

Memorandum of Agreement

Submitted to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation

Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800.6 (a)

WHEREAS, Vicksburg National Military Park (VNMP) was established on February 21, 1899, (30 Stat. 841) “to commemorate the campaign and siege and defense of Vicksburg, and to preserve the history of the battles and operations of the siege and defense on the ground where they were fought and were carried on;” and

WHEREAS, the Secretary of War appointed three commissioners to direct and conduct the affairs of VNMP; and

WHEREAS, the duties of the Commissioners included the responsibility “to open and construct and to repair such roads as may be necessary to said purposes;” and

WHEREAS, the Commissioners contracted with the Penn Bridge Company to construct an arch truss bridge, now known as the Confederate Avenue Steel Arch Bridge, to span the south fork of Glass Bayou; and

WHEREAS, the Confederate Avenue Steel Arch Bridge, that measures 270 feet in length, was completed in 1903 for the purpose of conveying horse and buggy traffic over the valley of Glass Bayou; and

WHEREAS, the Confederate Avenue Steel Arch Bridge is a significant feature of the landscape created to commemorate the campaign and siege and defense of Vicksburg; and

WHEREAS, by the early 1960s the bridge evidenced deterioration of the deck, railings, and support structure that caused VNMP officials to worry about its ability to carry the increasing number of buses and large motor homes that traveled park roads as well as the heavy volume of daily car traffic; and

WHEREAS, in 1972 the National Park Service (NPS) constructed a new bridge alongside and then closed the Confederate Avenue Steel Arch Bridge to vehicular traffic; and

WHEREAS, continued and accelerated deterioration of the bridge compelled the NPS in the early 1990s to close the bridge to pedestrian traffic; and

WHEREAS, the U. S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in its biennial Bridge Inspection Reports has documented continued deterioration of the bridge over the past thirty years; and

WHEREAS, in its November 1997 Bridge Inspection Report, FHWA noted the following deficiencies:

- Deck joint over north pier is open; remaining deck joints contain broken asphalt
- Severe checking and deterioration of curbs
- Truss and deck appear to have sagged at south pier, west side
- Minor rusting and vegetation growth throughout bearings and truss members; severe rusting of northwest bearing area
- Moderate to severe rust with minor section loss on several bracing and lattice members
- Severe erosion of north abutment slope with abutment footing exposed at east and west sides and undermined up to 10 inch X 39 inch deep erosion hole at northeast wingwall. Footing exposed at west side of south abutment
- Erosion and undermining at south pier, west footing noted in previous report. The problem was corrected, but has recurred; exposing up to 5 feet due to severe slope erosion; and

WHEREAS, due to these documented deficiencies FHWA in its 1997 report rated the bridge's Priority of Improvement an "A" classification, meaning the "Structure is closed, is in imminent danger of collapse, or presents a critical safety hazard;" and

WHEREAS, in its most recent Bridge Inspection Report, dated November 1999, FHWA rated the bridges Priority of Improvement "Critical," and recommended "consideration should be given to removal of the structure;" and

WHEREAS, in September 2000, the FHWA estimated cost of repairs to the bridge at \$1,200,000, a figure that has probably escalated; and

WHEREAS, in November 2001, the southwest thrust block slid downslope and became disengaged from the bridge causing a redistribution of the forces in the steel arch itself, possibly leading to stresses which exceed those the structure was designed for; and

WHEREAS, in December 2001, officials from the City of Vicksburg (CITY) and Warren County (COUNTY), fearing the bridge in imminent danger of collapse, closed the public road that runs beneath the bridge based on the recommendation of VNMP and FHWA, thus detouring more than 2,500 vehicles daily, including emergency vehicles and school buses; and

WHEREAS, the NPS, recognizing the historical significance of the bridge due to its unique design—being the only steel arch bridge in Mississippi--has included the bridge on the List of Classified Structures (LCS 91225); and

WHEREAS, the Mississippi State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) documented the Confederate Avenue Steel Arch Bridge in a grouping with other historic bridges in Mississippi, and also nominated it to the National Register of Historic Places, where it was listed in 1990; and

WHEREAS, the bridge has been documented in accordance with the standards of the Historic American Building Survey (HABS)/Historic American Engineering Record (HAER); and

WHEREAS, the NPS has studied, in conjunction with FHWA, CITY and COUNTY officials, and the SHPO, pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470 (f)), and with comments from the general public, various options for action regarding the bridge, from demolition to stabilization to restoration; and

WHEREAS, it has been determined that the interests of public safety necessitate the demolition of the bridge; and

WHEREAS, the SHPO laments the loss of the only extant steel arch bridge in Mississippi due to its lack of maintenance;

NOW, THEREFORE, NPS (VNMP), FHWA, and the SHPO agree that the proposed undertaking constitutes an adverse effect on a significant, National Register listed, feature of VNMP and that the undertaking shall be implemented in accordance with the following stipulation in the consideration of its effect on the historic property:

The NPS agrees to preserve and maintain the remaining historic bridges in the VNMP as long as they are structurally sound, and if replacement becomes necessary it will be done in keeping with their historic design and appearance in order to preserve the historic commemorative landscape.

Execution of this Memorandum of Agreement by NPS (VNMP), FHWA, and the SHPO, its subsequent acceptance by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and implementation of its terms, evidence that NPS (VNMP) has afforded the Council an opportunity to comment on the demolition and removal of the Confederate Avenue Steel Arch Bridge and its effect on historic properties and has satisfied the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470 (f)).

Approved: National Park Service

By: _____
William O. Nichols, Superintendent, Vicksburg National Military Park

By: _____
Jerry Belson, Regional Director, National Park Service

Concur: Federal Highway Administration

By: _____

Mississippi Department of Archives and History

By: _____
Elbert R. Hilliard, SHPO

Approved: Advisory Council on Historic Preservation

By: _____